DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 666 SO 025 530

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TITLE Transformational Action as the Goal of Teaching Public Issues: Creating a Classroom Environment Where Social Action Can Flourish.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 56p.; Paper presented at a Conference on Citizenship Education: Canadian and International Dimensions (Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, April 5-7, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Activism; *Citizen Participation; Citizenship Education; Foreign Countries; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Political Issues; *Public Policy; Public Sector; Secondary Education; *Social Action; *Social Attitudes; *Social Change; *Social Responsibility; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS Senge (Peter)

ABSTRACT

This paper renews the case for social action as a necessary and exciting part of the social studies curriculum and suggests that the social study of public issues should have a central place within this vision. The document focuses more on practical ideas that social studies teachers who have chosen to work in the area of social action, or those who might choose to do so, may use to proceed with their work. To do this, the paper has drawn largely from theoretical writings on learning organizations from the business world, particularly the work of Peter Senge. The contention is that social action within a social studies classroom and corporate action within a business community share many similarities: (1) they both work towards definable goals derived from a "big picture" vision; (2) they both must take advantage of individual strengths within the community; and (3) they both work in dynamic circumstances where knowledge is constituted within action and where decisions must constantly be made and remade to respond to changes in the environment. Recommendations are for the study of public issues as a way to increase student participation and bolster citizenship education. Contains 22 references. (EH)

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Transformational Action as the Goal of Teaching Public Issues: Creating a Classroom Environment Where Social Action Can Flourish

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A paper presented at Citizenship Education:

Canadian and International Dimensions

St. Thomas University

Fredericton, New Brunswick

April 5-7, 1995

SO 025 530

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Transformational Action as the Goal of Teaching Public Issues: Creating a Classroom Environment Where Social Action Can Flourish

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Civic education involves the development of skills in making decisions about public issues and participating in public affairs and encompasses the preservation of core democratic concepts and values.

(John D. Hoge)

The connection between social studies and citizenship education has been invariably intimate. Social studies educators have, since the origin of the subject area and its placement into the school curriculum, linked the study of the social world with the education of citizens (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977). And, although there have been discordant historical conceptions of what the social studies ought to be, the education of citizens has always remained the sum and substance of the subject area (Brubaker, D. L., Simon, & Williams, 1977). But, more controversial (Brubaker, Simon, & Williams, 1977, imply) than holding citizenship as the cornerstone concept of the subject area has been an explication of what citizenship education should entail. Social studies educators have argued long and hard over some very basic questions: "What are the qualities of a good citizen?" "How can citizenship be taught?" "What is the intellectual and social maturity of the student?" "How should the teaching of citizenship be evaluated?" Always somewhere in the historical

arguments of social studies education has breathed a small and almost renegade movement centered on at least three constituent elements: good citizenship education must advocate action, citizens should both learn and participate, and students have the right, the duty, and the ability to think and act (Newmann, 1975).

The purpose of this paper is to renew the case for social action (social-political involvement as Brubaker has called it) as a necessary and exciting part of the social studies curriculum and to suggest that the social study of public issues should have a central place within this vision. Specifically, we begin this paper in the middle[1]. We have chosen not to focus our attention so much on reviewing the work of those social studies writers and thinkers who have already laid out extensive groundwork for social action in a social studies classroom[2]. Instead, we will focus more on practical ideas that social studies teachers who have chosen to work in the area of social action, or those who might choose to do so, may use to proceed with their work. To do this, we have drawn largely from theoretical writings on learning organizations from the business world, particularly the work of Peter Senge. Our contention is that social action within a social studies classroom and corporate action within a business community share many similarities. They both work towards definable goals derived from a "big picture" vision; they both must take advantage of individual strengths within the community; and they both

[1]We hope that this choice does not frustrate our readers; however, as important as a review of this area is, there is not enough space to review the area completely. Essentially, our paper makes five points: (1) social studies and citizenship go hand-in-hand -- citizenship education is the sum and substance of the social studies; (2) within democratic society, good citizenship must necessarily include two basic qualities -- knowledge and action; (3) for many reasons, social action within the social studies curricula is underdeveloped; (4) social action is a sound inclusion into social studies curricula, for both pedagogical and ethical reasons; and (5) there exists a base of literature, in the case of this paper from the business world, that supports social action in practical ways.

[2]Chief among them is Fred Newmann's classic book Education for Citizen Action, written in 1975.

work in dynamic circumstances where knowledge is constituted within action and where decisions must constantly be made and remade to respond to changes in the environment.

We are not alone in linking social studies with the world of business or for suggesting that these links can be educative. Leppard's (1993) "Teaching for Democratic Action in a Deliberative Democracy" describes the rationale, instructional objectives, and instructional procedures of the National Issues Forum program for secondary social studies. He asserts that the program's content and learning strategies develop and improve student's decision-making skills and knowledge of significant contemporary issues and contends that business and corporate leaders share the commitment to effective learning environments and deliberative discussion of public issues. Both communities, he contends, need to create a significant place for the social study of public issues.

Other recent writers have made a strong case that social studies should encourage active student participation and involvement in important public issues. Ahlquist (1990) suggests that if students are to participate as intelligent citizens, they must develop and practice the skills which they are called upon to use as citizens. Historically, social studies teachers have understood that their students should be encouraged to know what is happening around them; should come to learn that they can make a difference by participating in the social and political processes; and should, from a praxical learning as they participate, more fully envision their own roles as citizens in a democratic society. "Empowerment" is the term that many social studies educators have used to describe that ability of citizens to act and to effect change.

Parker (1991a) argues that social studies at all levels should promote student analysis of controversial public issues and develop students' understanding of pluralism and democratic principles. Shaver (1984) promotes a jurisprudential approach that focuses on the analysis of public issues, suggesting that a focus on case studies of public issues explains, by example, the proper emphasis on decision-making and its natural concomitants of disagreement and value conflict as central components of democratic citizenship. Chamberlin's (1991) research seems to support this view. His work with fourth grade students, whose teachers sought to engage them in social action, indicates that most students believed that passive citizens were good citizens and that it was useless, anyway, to participate. Social action would fail no matter what they did. In response, Chamberlin argues that schools need to promote active citizenship.

Many recent writers in social studies have repeated Chamberlin's argument. In addition, they have pointed to the increased need for social action in a post-modern society. In such a society, critics (e. g. Ahlquist, 1990) suggest that social studies must be interdisciplinary, global in perspective, contextual, controversial, and must help students employ critical thinking to solve real problems. Ahlquist also distinguishes between weak forms of critical thinking (those restricted to logical thinking) and strong forms of critical pedagogy (those incorporating a moral component into critical thinking). She calls for the latter.

Gilbert (1992) also discusses social education's possible responses to post-modernism. He supports the need for active citizenship, claiming that post-

modernism is a major cultural re-orientation in Western society which has wide-ranging implications for knowledge, morality, politics, and individual identities. In particular, Gilbert suggests that post-modernism raises doubts about the future of citizenship education. In his article, Gilbert notes Philip Wexler's pessimistic assessment of the prospects for citizenship in a society dominated by television and image consumption. He also notes the need for an expansion of the idea of citizenship from civil, political, and welfare entitlements to citizenship as a greater participation in the cultural and economic dimensions of everyday life. This concept has power, he suggests, because it can inform a comprehensive and coherent approach to citizenship and a successful, active curriculum in citizenship education. From a practical point of view from the perspective of a classroom social studies teacher, a focus on active citizenship in everyday life offers innumerable opportunities for social action in the classroom.

Ranson's (1990) work concedes the increasing need for citizenship education that includes social action. He states that post-war society sought to create the conditions for an educated public; however, social transformations since the mid-70s brought the limitations of a common social democracy into sharper focus. He calls the idea of merely "delivering" citizenship education to a passive public conceptually flawed. He states that the predicament of our time is that an active public domain is required to constitute the just conditions for all citizens to develop their powers and capacities; but, he believes that society lacks the conditions for creating such an active public domain. If his argument has merit, social action is an even more necessary part of the social studies.

Ranson's work, like this paper, seeks to explore and establish the presuppositions for recreating an active public (or, in this case, an active social studies student). The essential question is how to encourage the possibility of personal empowerment and, at the same time, work to revive an active public domain. This paper will contend that citizenship education -- especially the education of socially active citizens -- can work to help achieve this elusive goal. Our personal judgment is that social action is an underdeveloped area of the social studies. As a result of this underdevelopment, many young adults lack the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that promote active, powerful, and responsible citizenship. Our paper suggests that citizenship education can be improved through an increase in the depth of topics, classroom environments that are conducive to open and free exchanges of ideas, and increased student participation in active working with public issues.

Why be concerned about social action in a study of public issues?

Historically, examples of citizenship education in Canada through social action can be most strikingly observed in the realm of adult education. Various initiatives in this country, including the Antigonish movement which thrived in the early part of this century in Nova Scotia, guided by the visionary leadership of Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins, and the Citizens' Radio Forum broadcast across the country in the 1940s[3], have proven so

[3]Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins, both Catholic priests, used the small study group method to educate people. Gathering in kitchens to learn through talk with the help of a trained community member and pamphlets, people uncovered and gradually assumed personal responsibility for the larger issues underpinning their poverty, and formed projects to improve their living conditions. The Antigonish movement resulted in fisherman's cooperatives throughout Nova Scotia and other parts of the Maritimes.

successful that they serve as models internationally for citizenship education, particularly for developing countries. The fundamental components of these movements, like similar programs in critical pedagogy such as Freire's work in Brazil and Myles Horton's work in the Appalachians, include:

1. Articulating the issues: Through small group dialogue, perhaps assisted by a facilitator, students work to see and name the issues that concern them most.

2. Identifying and challenging assumptions: Conversation is guided to help students recognize their own "taken-for-granted" constructs about reality, especially regarding who has power, whose interests are being served by the prevailing "way-things-are-done-around-here," and what things can be changed or not changed.

3. Forming a vision: Successful social action projects are marked by a group, together and creatively, building a clear concrete vision for a more desirable future. The design of a specific project towards actualizing that future scenario is a generative activity, creating something new, marked by a positive energy of aspiration. This activity is certainly related to problem-solving, but its stance seems to be subtly different in kind to a problem-solving orientation, which somehow presumes that the natural order of things has been

The Citizen's Radio Forum, a child of the Farm Radio Forum co-sponsored by the CBC and Canadian Association of Adult Education, broadcast presentations focused on various public issues of concern to people who gathered in small groups in family homes to listen. Listeners discussed the issue with the use of pamphlets mailed out across Canada, then communicated their responses back to the organizers who would compile and broadcast the results. Myles Horton, dubbed "the radical hillbilly" by adult educators, founded the Highlander Center for adult education in a poverty-stricken area of the Appalachian mountains in Tennessee. Participants learned to recognize and discuss and take action in the policy issues constructing their lives, resulting in union movements in the 1930s and civil rights activism in the 1950s and 1960s.

temporarily disturbed and must be restored. The problem-solver is therefore a fixer, stamping out negative blots on the existing world, rather than a creator, conjuring new worlds.

4. Enacting the vision: Through a project of action and through critical reflection on events and decisions comprising that project, participants learn how to be participating citizens, interdependent, co-creating a thriving community who boldly and continuously learn what they need to accomplish objectives they determine to make changes that matter to them.

Naturally these components do not progress in a linear, stepwise orthodoxy of technique. Vision begins with one outcome that often changes through the process of action as a different vision emerges. This process is commonly referred to as "enlightenment," when students identify assumptions and begin to recognize how their own limiting worldviews have hindered their freedom or abundance of life. Instead of a procedure, it is, instead, more of an unfolding that takes place during the project of action.

The overall process of learning through social action in these examples of adult citizenship education typically achieves similar results. People experience a transformation of attitude from passive observation or reactivity to the events around them, to caring involvement sometimes achieving extraordinary intensity. They grasp onto a personal stake in the issue, a commitment which propels and builds a momentum of motivation throughout the frustrations and exigencies of an action project. Their circle of vision expands from self, as isolated and perhaps alienated from other people and their power, to self as integrally ar l powerfully linked to one's

immediate community, which is influencing and capable of collaborating with other communities in a system. They are learning complex new skills and understandings holistically and concurrently. These understandings include: practical knowledge required for the project; communicative knowledge about ways to understand others and express oneself effectively even at those crucial points in the project where options conflict; and self-knowledge of rich new possibilities, old habits of thinking, and appreciation of the answers already known, the gifts already possessed.

The key to this almost utopian experience of learning seems to rest partially in the opportunity and motivation for students' active involvement in authentic, meaningful action directed towards a purpose they care about. But primarily, the crucial catalyst in all these projects of critical experiential learning is their starting place: issues come from the students themselves[4]. The role of the skillful teacher is the role of a listener and guide -- drawing forth students' voices in a climate of trust and respect and helping issues bubble to the surface through talk. The even more delicate task is helping students arrive at those exciting moments where they discover that what they conceived to be their own private issues are scenes within larger enduring stories of power and freedom and forces constructing other public issues. A concomitant revelation often is that many public issues that, at first, appear to dwell "out there" in the land of somebody-else's-responsibility reach like tree

[4]This is one reason why we have chosen not to give example after example of social studies teachers and students engaged in a variety of social action projects within their own social studies classroom. Our experience is that such examples are constraining in two ways: first, they limit the focus of the paper on what has been done instead of what could be done in a general way and, second, they seem to model the particular projects as ends in themselves instead encouraging the idea that the projects would be individually chosen by any person within a social studies class.

roots under and grow into the private struggles that live "in here," in the world of self and home and friends.

In classrooms, while students' concerns sometimes influence the choice of issue to be studied, more often the study of public issues stems from teacher concern or curriculum mandate. Decisions to study public issues may be either pedagogical (for example, helping students learn the skills of democratic participation) or personal (for example, an "activist" social studies teacher inspires or encourages like-minded action from students -- like taking environmental action in the community or exploring a student concern within the school).

Reasons for teaching public issues are obvious to social studies teachers. First, the task of teaching public issues is part of the teaching of citizenship education. And, almost every rationale for teaching social studies supports the teaching of citizenship education and includes at least some mention that any idea of citizenship education includes a notion of the ideal citizen, who is an "active citizen" -- one who is **connected** to the world. Furthermore, part of the connection for young citizens with the larger world is the fundamental belief of social studies curricula that public issues are part of an understanding of the world and of human dilemma, and there can be no academic maturity that does not move young people from issues within their own private worlds (inside them) to issues in the public world (outside of them)[5].

[5]The language used here seems to suggest dual worlds -- one inside the person and one outside the person. Our employment of this language structure denotes the idiosyncratic language of teaching and curricula more than it does our own thinking on this philosophical point.

A second valid reason to study public issues is academic. The study of public issues helps students form a well-considered and logically-supported opinion; and, in supporting this rational opinion, students will crystallize their ideas and articulate them to others. As students become more skillful at this crystallization and articulation, they increasingly find their own voices and validate themselves by being listened to and by responding seriously to others who are also in the process of "voicing and validation."

Both of these activities -- personal articulation and personal validation -- represent the fundamental principle of the democratic society where a citizen engages personally with the state and takes responsibility for the state and for other citizens within it. Simply stated, without active citizens, democracies can not function as they are supposed to. Most democratic societies work from the understanding that good citizens are people who actively collaborate, in voice, with others.

A third, and also academic, reason to study public issues is to help young citizens recognize that there exists, in the world, a variety of views and that many of these views are equally meritorious. As they are making this recognition, they will also learn to acknowledge that several different perspectives are possible (and tolerable) among people of honor, and they need not be compelled to accept a for-against polarity among these perspectives. By studying public issues, students learn that in collaborating they will learn and understand multiple perspectives. They learn that human life can be enriched by multiple perspectives instead of confused by them. And they learn to truly listen to and, in the process, perhaps better

understand other viewpoints. In academic terminology, students are learning to collaborate and empathize in tolerance and understanding.

A fourth reason to study public issues is to help students learn the process and skills of critical thinking. Studying public issues helps students learn to rigorously analyze other views: to establish WHO is speaking; WHY the person or people are speaking (the motive -- the agenda); WHAT assumptions and values underpin the viewpoints expressed; WHAT persuasive techniques are used to advance the point of view; HOW to see the gaps and silences; HOW to note WHO is not heard; HOW to note WHO is marginalized or accepted only as idiosyncratically curious in the debate, not listened to seriously; etc. As they learn these skills of "objective" analysis, students also help themselves recognize their own assumptions and the values that underpin their opinions. In short, they are learning the skills of critical thinking. These are all worthwhile goals.

Problems with Current Ways of Teaching Public Issues: Over-Adherence to a Model for Teaching and Learning

However, these worthwhile goals are not always being achieved within the social studies classroom. One reason these goals are not achieved more fully is that students and teachers often rely too strongly on "crutches." These crutches are the step-by-step models or procedures that are usually prescribed to teachers and students for dealing with public issues in the social studies classroom. Our contention is not that these models are flawed in their conception, nor that they are useless. Instead, we believe that they are often followed too strictly. They are too doctrinaire, too dogmatic, and too

categorical. They can be, and often are, treated as unchangeable prescriptions for learning.

When the form of the model of doing social action (or the study of social issues) becomes the dogma, it is like a seashell washed up on a beach. It may look beautiful, but it has no life. It is sturdy; symmetrical and orderly; one can understand and admire its logic. It is the logic of a structure that once held life, and the classroom is easier because this structure exists. The structure (or model) has its uses. Teachers can organize activity around it; and can use it to teach -- to show and tell. It is like the scientific method that, as one scientist suggested to us, forms a more ideal shape simply from the fact that it has been extracted from life. It represents a caricature. But, like the scientific method, which is not how real, active scientists live and work, the model for teaching social action is only life-like; it is not life.

Why, then, if a model does not contain life, is it used with students? As Brubaker (1977) suggests, the answer lies in part with the perception that educators have of students. Students are not seen as powerful enough or intelligent enough or with enough character or ethic. Therefore, they must be constrained by logic, by order, by a set of rules. Without this order, there would be no telling what might transpire in a social studies classroom. The model is designed as a student-proof system that will elicit controlled and tolerable results. The strength of this order? It subjects and constrains dynamic and "uniformed" young people by the order of a formal procedure.

Most work in the area of teaching public issues has focused on the strength of form and organization. As Oliver (1992) notes in "Teaching Public Issues in

the Secondary School Classroom," teaching social studies using public issues has followed the typical prototype of identifying issues, justifying and clarifying positions, and using a discussion process. Within this prototype, students are "forced" (at least in our experience the fidelity of their work through the steps of the procedure is evaluated) to go through a step-by-step process typically made up of linear activities like choosing an important issue, seeking information about this issue from a variety of sources, analyzing this information from a variety of perspectives (among other things, looking for bias), making a tentative decision, testing this decision, and then making a final decision. Only then is there discussion about whether or not action should be taken on this decision.

There is no question that the process has a certain amount of order and logic; and, while there may be some flexibility within the process -- as in the order of steps -- the basic steps of the process seldom change. In these systems, the belief that fortifies the teaching of public issues is that the system is the key, that teachers should teach students the logic of the system, and that students should comply to this logic. The result of following the system is that logical and informed decisions will come to pass. The belief also seems to be that young citizens are unable to develop positive, powerful attributes; hence, they should submit to the logic of the system which will do their reasoning for them.

The whole exercise is based on particular answers to foundational questions: Should students work to develop obedience or should they work to develop integrity and honesty (and other important characteristics of the democratic society)? Is it possible that "good" citizens will develop and prosper, without

the use of a specific form? Are people more crucial than models, or are models more crucial than people?

There are two kinds of strengths: the strength of formal order and the strength of character. Few critics questioned the underpinnings of the strength-of-form philosophy. Few suggested that subjecting students to forms might work to "educate" people who lacked courage and power of character, or that a strength-of-form philosophy tends to foster conformity. Seldom was the other strength -- the strength of character -- considered in teaching. But, it is possible to conceive of the teaching of citizenship as the teaching of character (character education; Lickona, 1988); and, within this structure, it is possible to use public issues to give social studies teachers a way to focus on building strength of character at the same time as problem-solving is taught. The question is: "Can young people develop strong characteristics?" Our contention in this paper is that a study of public issues that includes social action can help students develop the characteristics of good citizens.

Why teach social action?

There are many reasons for teaching social action. First, social action is fundamental to democratic theory. As they are completing social action, students are engaged in the praxis of learning -- learning by engaged doing. This learning is powerful because the fruits of action are "healthier," longer lasting. And, social action also grounds learning in reality. The learning can not be abstract if it is centered on the end of taking action on a particular problem. Grounding in reality also centers the learning in circumstance, and

it is when one learns in circumstance that the learning takes form -- not so much pie in the sky as practical knowing.

These historical reasons to teach public issues in a social studies classroom are all very acceptable, and social studies teachers and curriculum builders in social studies should work hard towards these goals. But, too often the study of public issues ends as an academic exercise inside the social studies classroom and never goes further. As a result, the learning is both academic and abstract -- un-attached to anything concrete.

Such abstract forms of citizenship learning have been attacked by a history of literature in social studies education (Engle, 1989; Martorella, 1985; Nelson, 1992; and others) who suggest that learning only the skills of critical thinking without acting on what is learned is learning in a vacuum. Their work implies some important questions: To what end is discussion? Should social studies be more than dilettantish spouting or armchair philosophizing? Without a connection to the "real world," will students learn that addressing public issues is beyond their control, and that talk debate (as opposed to action) is the worthwhile and reasonable end of learning?

Some critics even suggest that the action component of a social studies issues model is what makes an issue a public issue[6] and not simply a question. Action moves the social studies beyond the status of curious inquiry to the status of worthwhile social conduct. To be complete, these critics suggest, some action or decision must be pending or undertaken by some person or

[6]We have defined public issue broadly as an issue where there are a variety of perspectives, where a large number of citizens have a vested interest in any proposed solution, and where a decision to act in one particular way, as opposed to another, would meet with resistance and concern.

group. Without corresponding action, to what end is conversation? In the baser critique of young people, it's called "talking the talk and walking the walk" or "putting your money where your mouth is."

Why So Much Talk and So Little Action?

It takes little thought to see why encouraging students to take action on a public issue is a rarely-used pedagogical strategy of social studies teachers. Public pressure weighs heavily on social studies teachers, as it does on all teachers. All over Canada and North America, current social studies curricula are "results-based," which almost always translates into the question: "How well do your students do on standardized tests?" There is great pressure on Canadian social studies teachers to keep it neat, keep it clean -- and, in the process, keep it dead. There is great pressure to focus on the dead, objective content and not the dynamic, live issues that haunt human life on our seemingly, increasingly confused, littered, alienated, and disoriented planet.

Even if social studies teachers believe that they should include some attention to the teaching of current and dynamic public issues, there are reasons why studying a public issue is "best" done inside the classroom instead of outside the classroom in the "real world." Studying a public issue within the confines of a social studies classroom is manageable. Few things are cleaner, nor more boring, for students than rational thought and philosophical reasoning. For young citizens, a discussion that is disarmed by the rules of rationality is about as much fun as the yearly financial meeting of a large corporation. There is little emotion, or passion, or feeling, or life; and, more sadly, little lasting, life-changing learning.

Students learn best when the activities in which they are engaging are relevant to their interests, not abstract from their lives. When learning is relevant, students are "moved" to learn and moved by learning. Research is redundant (e. g. Parker, 1991b) with notes that students learn best and most when they are interested in the topic and the activities of their study.

But, regardless of what we know best about how students learn, often teachers have a different classroom agenda than their students. For teachers, who must walk the sidewalk of learning at the same time as they walk the sidewalk of classroom management at the same time as they walk the sidewalk of public scrutiny, it is easy to see the appeal of the rational. Rational arguments are controlled arguments. They are seldom heated; they are seldom impassioned; and, as a result, they are seldom out of control.

Rational language[7] values calmness and sees dissent as problematic something to be overcome. As a result, rational discussion works to eliminate dissent, rather than to celebrate it as a motivator of student interest and human action. Rational language is neat; it isolates and vivisects arguments from the emotional messiness and practical constraints and paradoxes that "clutter" real public issues. Even current events are typically studied using abstract reports from the "real world." These are called news clippings.

[7]It is important to note that we are not disputing the value of rational thought. However, we are questioning the value of **only** rational thought. Probably, we are remembering that our work with young people, both as teachers and coaches, suggests that this is "not where students are coming from" and they become frustrated if there are not opportunities to share other ways of understanding.

In many ways, the use of news clippings is a metaphor for the current study of public issues. News clippings "situate" public issues in the artificial hothouse environment of third-person analysis. "Important World Events" are then constructed in timed blocks -- as in "we are doing current events period four" -- and are seen as having as much weight (if luck would have it that they have any weight) as a historical study of the French Revolution (to pick a common topic a student typically studies in history), a topic whose study will not change appreciably in the next few weeks. For us, it prompts the question that the social studies student asks in Jeremy Irons' classroom in the movie Waterland. "How do you dare study the French Revolution when the world is coming to an end?" It's a good question: why would students really care about studying any public issue in a situation where the world is coming to an end? Why do teachers and social studies curricula insist on the use of rational language when rational language seems to dull the senses rather than motivate them?

Why Should Social Studies Teachers Encourage Social Action?

As mentioned above, one reason to encourage social action as part of the study of public issues is that students are encouraged to participate in the social studies classroom because they are "moved" by the possibility of acting on their beliefs. Social action also suits the foundational pedagogy of social studies education. One can hardly expect to advance the education of participating citizens without the opportunity to participate.

A third reason to encourage social action is that social action provides a circumstance and a context for learning. The literature on situated cognition

shows that students anchor their learning to the context in which the learning is embedded.[8] In practical terms, this means that even if students learn to recognize and listen to alternate viewpoints in a rational classroom discussion, what they have learned is that listening to alternate viewpoints is best done in a controlled environment, in situations where they are personally distanced from the issue, in the protective classrooms where institutional norms and graceful language are systematically applied, and in places where authoritative teachers who stipulate specific behaviors reign.

Students, in these "climate-controlled" environments, also learn to be insulated from the emotional conflicts of confronting people in crisis, from having their own personal priorities threatened, from becoming engaged in discussions where there are frustrations and logjams and interpersonal strife to figure out, and where accompanying action projects that produce change are "outside" of the classroom structure. Students are also, sadly, insulated from the beginning to develop the self-confidence and integrity and empowerment and personal transformation and experiences of communitarian synergy that results from groups of people involved in social change. The question becomes clear: shouldn't social studies teachers begin to involve students in action as a part of any study of public issues?

Other benefits of involving students in a social action project as part of a study of public issues include contextualizing the learning and working with students in collaborative ways as they study public issues within a classroom

[8]Two helpful readings in the area include Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), who maintain that "situations co-produce knowledge through activity," and a book by Lave and Wenger (1991) called Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. The Forward to this book by William F. Hanks is a particularly lucid account of Lave and Wenger's work.

community. Students learn better how to collaborate by collaborating in "authentic activity" than they do in artificial, classroom projects. The motivation for studying public issues is turned-on by problems in the real-world, and further motivated by the concreteness of these projects. Students who are excited and active begin to generate their own questions to guide their own learning, because they have to find out what needs to be done to be able to do the next step.

Studying public issues also integrates concrete projects with academic learning. In such a naturally integrated study, action and academic skills are combined to address a particular issue or problem. As a result, this integration helps students to learn all sorts of information, skills, and attitudes rapidly and in a holistic way.

Studying public issues also helps students learn practical skills that teachers might not even plan for and skills that teachers, most certainly, can not control. From the students' viewpoint, the study of public issues is expansive and opens up honest-to-goodness research -- not at all like a find-the-Easter-egg hunt. Instead of feigned, contrived, fabricated, and created inquiry where students find what the teacher or "expert" has hidden (questions at the end of chapters or exercises that test their ability to complete one of the steps of the model, for example), the action component of a study of public issues encourages students to explore and, in their exploration, learn things beyond what teachers can pre-determine using orderly, Lilliputian-like social studies lesson plan objectives. These expansive skills can be used in the employment of community action projects that encourage the building of community and the community involvement of others.

Concrete action projects bring students together with others in communities of different ages and different socio-economic classes. In communities of inquiry and action, students are exposed to real-life and different viewpoints. For many social studies teachers, the creation of these communities of inquiry and action are the best places to begin a study of public issues. Plus, there is a great community benefit to be found in choosing and completing a good project. In fact, something good might happen as a result of student work. Unless a study of public issues has a potential to benefit someone else, why should it be studied?

The study of public issues also encourages long-term learning. In our experience as students, we remember clearly our involvement in such projects. In our own communities of inquiry and action, our own learning was enhanced and our skills of inquiry and action were anchored and retained. When action truly works, and this doesn't necessarily mean that the anticipated end result is achieved, students will truly learn that it's possible to get involved in community action and that it's rewarding. For most students, talking is insufficient for the encouragement of active participation. Specifically, if all a teacher does is to tell students "here are some ways people have been involved throughout history," that teacher simply teaches students that action is something other people do.

What Considerations Prevent Teachers from Taking Public Issue Study to Action?

Social studies teachers, like other teachers, have two jobs; and, sometimes these jobs conflict. First, they are hired to teach students and engage these students in scholarly assignments that will lead them toward academic maturity. Second, they are hired as agents of the state. As teachers of students, they must teach ethically. That is, their job is to fully educate students. It is not to create personal disciples.

Specifically, social studies teachers understand that one of their tasks is to present a balanced perspective of points of view, especially in a multi-cultural society. If teachers attempted to direct students toward one particular viewpoint, they would be violating ethical understandings that represent an almost unspoken code that social studies teachers live by in the classroom. On the other hand, social studies teachers are hired by the state to promote a state-certified history, perspective, and viewpoint. Sometimes these state-certified viewpoints are obvious; sometimes they are subtle.

For example, rationality, materialism, consumerism, competition, and written literacy are subtle value positions taught in Canadian schools, but seldom challenged by those in Canadian schools. As social studies teachers, we take these perspectives for granted, acting as if there were no choice. Only when we come to critically understand that there are, indeed, "reasoned" challenges to these "biases" can we come to consider them seriously.

Another teacher consideration that must be addressed when attempting social action in response to a study of public issues is the fear of community reaction to action that might be "let loose" on the community. Stasis seldom offends. Torpidity is safer than energy. Apathy is safer than action. Standing still pedagogically gets teachers into less trouble than moving around. When students become committed to action, sometimes they act in ways that disturb the status quo -- which is exactly what their intention often is. Students who cause disturbances, even if these disturbances are in the business of their education, can provoke reactions by both administrators and the community. As a result, some teachers learn "the hard way" that their community wishes their schools and their students to remain uninvolved[9].

A third reason why teachers sometimes do not engage their students in social action is that their students can not be engaged. Students are often, by choice, apathetic. Sometimes teachers have worked hard to encourage student involvement, but without success. As a result, they anticipate that students will not respond, no matter what they as teachers do, and have stopped trying. Sometimes it's hard enough to get students to even listen to another viewpoint -- someone else's viewpoint -- seriously. Some students seem almost unable to even acknowledge that someone thinks, or could think, differently than they do. They are poised to reject differences more quickly than to tolerate them.

[9]As we were finishing this paper, a science teacher in Washington state was being brought before the school board by parents who were concerned about a test-tube experiment he was running to show how quickly AIDS could spread. The parents argued that students found the experiment sexually provocative and were embarrassed. However, the newspaper reported that each student was asked and no one found the experiment problematic.

Other more practical matters can stop teachers from encouraging action. These include constraints of time-tabling, dollars, drains on teachers' energy, and lack of support from the administration or recognition for such projects from the institution. Pedagogically, because teachers are agents of a government and are required to follow governmental constraints -- like a curriculum -- projects may not fit within the timelines of a particular unit, and certain important areas may "not be covered" if teachers do social action projects concomitant with their study of public issues. Action projects may end up teaching students things that aren't prescribed in the curriculum; and, therefore, these action projects are, of course, seen as complete wastes of time to any outsider who follows the axiom that "if it can't be measured, it wasn't done."

A final problem with social action is that it is difficult to evaluate. One of the most difficult aspects of any teaching is evaluation; this is especially true when social action is a part of a curriculum. How does a teacher evaluate what students have learned if it is not specifically controlled? How does a teacher justify action projects to the administration when, as in Alberta, these action projects don't address questions students will find on a provincial exam? How will administrators respond to the idea that, as much as social action can be justified pedagogically, it will probably steal the focus away from more rigorous study for provincial or other standardized exams -- the certified ways that their schools are measured in the public's eye?

Other Evidence: The Fundamental Principles of Learning Organizations

One way to support using social action within a social studies classroom is to look for evidence from other areas where goals, opportunities, and procedures might be transferred into social studies citizenship education. One area might be the business community. Recent theoretical literature from the business world, based primarily on the work of Peter Senge (1990) and responding to what has been named the "Total Quality Management" movement derived from Japanese business success, encourages businesses to re-constitute themselves as **learning organizations**. Senge describes three essential concerns with what he sees happening in today's world: fragmentation, competition, and reactiveness (Kofman & Senge, 1995).

Senge felt that when a group of people loses a sense of the whole to focus on the parts fragmentation occurs. This fragmentation severs understandings into bits of ideas and fractures communities into alienated individuals and competitive elements. People begin to frame the work in front of them and the world outside them through a small window, as a series of problems to be solved. The resulting situation is analogous to the Sufi tale of the six different conceptions of the elephant. Without a sense of the whole, solutions are devised for particular problems with little consideration of how the solution affects the long-term or impacts the entire system. Often, as a result of this lack of vision, solutions may work in the short-term but backfire in the long-term and make the underlying conditions worse. Overall change of the system is impossible when effort is focused on its independent parts.

The analytical tradition of amassing data and arguing and evaluating various points of view on issues encourages people to be reactive to the issues around them. Analytical discussions tend to be characterized by endless circular talk as individuals air their opinions, which Senge likens to the "percussion" of ping-pong balls bouncing back and forth. There is little meaningful dialogue without the animation of a vision and the momentum provided by meaningful purpose for talk. Even when "space" is made for diverse perspectives, analytical discussions are de-constructive and encourage passivity, rather than being constructive and catalyzing creative action.

The ethic of competition in North America's educational system and other organizations is fastened firmly in place by overwhelming emphasis on accountability and measurement. Competition can alienate people and fragment communities. A competitive focus on visible outcomes reinforces the task-oriented behavior of analyzing and finding solutions to problems. Little value is placed on thoughtful consideration of the blind spots, faulty assumptions, entrenched patterns of group behavior, and sometimes limited loops of thinking that often are creating the very conditions which sustain the very problems we want to eliminate.

Writers promoting organizational learning stress that new focus must be placed on building communities through holistic projects of creative action, entwined with deliberate efforts to promote individual and group critical reflection, through meaningful dialogue, on the project process. Senge calls these communities learning organizations. His The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (p 51) describes the principles of a learning organization by noting that in a learning organization...

"a. People feel they're doing something that matters -- to them personally and to the larger world.

b. Every individual in the organization is somehow stretching, growing, or enhancing his (or her) capacity to create.

c. People are more intelligent together than they are apart. If you want something really creative done, you ask a team to do it -- instead of sending one person off to do it on his or her own.

d. The organization continually becomes more aware of its underlying knowledge base -- particularly the store of tacit, unarticulated knowledge in the hearts and minds of employees.

e. Visions of the direction of the enterprise emerge from all levels. The responsibility of top management is to manage the process whereby new emerging visions become shared visions.

f. Employees are invited to learn what is going on at every level of the organization, so they can understand how their actions influence others.

g. People feel free to inquire about each others' (and their own) assumptions and biases. There are few (if any) sacred cows or undiscussable subjects.

h. People treat each other as colleagues. There's a mutual respect and trust in the way they talk to each other, and work together, no matter what their positions may be.

i. People feel free to try experiments, take risks, and openly assess the results. No one is killed for making a mistake."

How Does the Learning Organization Literature Apply to Social Action?

This theoretical literature from the world of business about learning organizations holds potential merit for social studies classrooms and social studies teachers who wish to engage their students in social action. First, like a business community, a social studies classroom is also a community. Within it, there live a variety of people -- young as they often are -- with a variety of talents, skills, knowledges, and abilities. And, like a business, the classroom organization works better when members (citizens) are able to use, both individually and in community, the unique talents, skills, insights, knowledges, and abilities they possess.

Second, the principles that undergird a learning organization within a business community have been echoed by those social studies teachers who have championed the need for an active, dynamic organization of youthful citizens created from within the boundaries of a social studies classroom. The sort of social studies classrooms they have entreated are themselves communities, well-versed in cooperative learning and taking advantage of and developing further the human gifts of young citizens. For social studies teachers whose pedagogical desire is the education of powerful, participating citizens (a goal, as we noted, historically endorsed for the subject area called social studies), what better culture or environment would there be for the education of these citizens? Students, necessarily, come to school without a great deal of experience or formal and informal political learning. If they are to become actively engaged and powerful to shape their worlds, they need a place to learn and grow. The social environment of the school, especially one

utilizing the principles of a learning organization listed above, provides just that place.

Peter Senge and his colleagues postulate five principles of learning organizations:

Principle One: Personal Mastery

The principle of personal mastery is based on the belief that internal orientations and characteristics can and should become the powerful influences on human agency and that personal ethical power can and should come from inside a person in the form of principles, values, and attitudes, rather than coming from the outside through coercion and force. Instead of depending on external force to change effort from without, a focus on external stimuli[10], the growth toward personal mastery focuses on developing internal characteristics that change and shape action from within. The person, in order to affect positive change, builds positive internal ethical principles.

These ethical principles become guides for personal mastery. A central belief in personal mastery is that students should come to question and understand their purposes in activity: why do they do what they do? Also central to the attainment of personal mastery is gaining a sense of moral vision for yourself

[10]The focus on external stimuli and a person's unavoidable response to this external stimuli is the basis for Skinner's theory of behaviorism. The debate about behaviorism has been long and protracted within the educational community and it is not the prerogative of this paper to add to that debate. However, the point is that one of the fundamental assumptions of behaviorism is that humans do not have freedom to act. This assumption is the antithesis of social studies citizenship education, which is premised on the belief that learning (both knowledge and action) encourages thoughtful and considered action. In other words, what people do can and does make a difference. Simply stated, the task of social studies education is to thoughtfully help educate those people who will make a positive difference.

and how you can and should act generally and in particular situations. This moral vision energizes and gives strength. Gaining a strong moral vision means answering the following questions: What do you believe about how life should be lived? What should humans try to accomplish?

These are powerful questions for anyone attempting to engage in social action. For social studies students, there must, in trying to solve social problems about public issues, be a motivating reason for doing or for not doing. History is replete with examples of people who affect change guided by a personal, moral vision of how the world could be, instead of settling for how the world is.

Once a personal vision has begun to form, students are ready to work with others to shape a shared, or community, vision. Personal mastery does not simply mean working alone; rather, it is constituted in part on the belief that people have novel talents and skills and that these can sometimes be best exercised when working within the structure of a group or community where others also are able to express themselves through their own, unique skills and are encouraged and allowed to share these skills with others.

The major goal of personal mastery is to develop the capability to create what we care about. Pivotal to this capability is the education of the powerful citizen/learner. The powerful citizen/learner lives within the constant tension between personal visions of how the world can be and the reality of how the world is. The movement and the goal of education is the activity to turn ideas into commitments -- to choose the actions that shape the future in

the ways that one envisions, always working from the belief that action shapes destiny.

Consequently, the central question or focus is: What do you really want? The orientation of personal mastery is creative and proactive. Citizens with positive power do not always adapt their actions to the future, because the future is not out of their control. Instead, citizens shape and create the future through the thoughtful force of their actions upon the world, working with others to shape the course of human occurrences. Instead of reacting, citizens with personal mastery create. And, instead of the solitary aloneness of independence, powerful citizens share the community of the interdependent.

2. Shared Vision

The second principle of a learning organization is shared vision. Businesses, who see themselves as learning organizations, work to organize action by shaping the vision of the community. The result of this shared vision for a business community is striving for the same goals. Shared vision, a key organizing structure for those businesses organized around the principles of what has been named "total quality management," can also work in the social studies classroom.

Students within the classroom that works as a learning organization work together to form the shared vision based on a meaning of what can be done. This shared vision helps shape the questions that become the natural organizing center of the discussion of a public issue: Can this problem be

solved? If so, how can it be solved? What impact will attempts at the solution have on those who are close to the problem?

Social studies teachers who believe that their classes can become communities where positive and empowering social action can take place believe that the building of a community within the classroom that works toward the image of a desired future is important. The practical work of such a class would include the building of a plan to arrive at that future. This plan focuses not on the piecemeal little bits of information that only seem to take care of the right now, but focuses on the core, fundamental values of the group -- an overriding ethic and vision. This vision guides action and offers a way to evaluate the integrity of small actions or decisions (do they work toward the major goal or vision?) and overcome the possible despair that comes when the short-term work does not seem to be successful. Many citizens need to know that there is a reason "to keep on keeping on," even when the present action does not seem to be fruitful. Allowing ourselves to be guided by the shared vision not only works to develop a community of citizens, it also helps the community face the potential paralysis that can come from the natural, but too seductive, focus on little defeats. It also allows the reshaping of the present with the future in mind: it is possible to change or reshape the action without changing or reshaping the vision.

3. Mental Models

A mental model is a paradigm, a way of seeing the world. Within business communities, mental models help structure activities. For example, a particular company might put a premium on service and shape its activities using this mental model. Within a social studies classroom, each student also works to create a mental model.

In other words, students work to describe and live within their own world view or paradigm. They come to see that they view the world through a particular set of values (e.g. materialism, ethnicity, getting ahead, Christianity) and that, to some extent, they can make a conscious choice about this world view. Within a social studies classroom based on creating places where students can take positive social action on public issues, one task of the social studies teacher is to focus on helping students arrive at a place where they are able to answer the question "What general principles do I work from?" for themselves. If students can outline their own general principles, they have a better way to adjudicate their actions -- to tell if these actions are consonant with their values[11].

A key value of working from a mental model is that the student gains a criteria for judging. Often people believe that one must "suspend" judgment in the face of alternatives. By this suspension, they mean waiting to decide, usually after "all" the evidence has been collected and considered. But, the

[11]This activity reconstitutes, in a way, the work of Raths, Harmin, and Simon (1966) but attempt to address, as well, both the content and the process of the values and the underlying structure of how the values are formed. In this dual consideration, it recognizes the criticism of values clarification set forth by Stewart (1975).

suspension of judgment might also mean to suspend, as in hanging the judgment out in the open where it can be seen and studied. Sometimes, the suspension of judgment, as in holding off making a decision, is neither productive nor realistic.

It is, instead, possible to both hold a strong view and listen to others' views. In fact, it is often easier to listen carefully to others when your own view is strong and considered -- already worked out. The creation and the open discussion of mental models helps uncover issues, new ways of thinking, personal perspectives, organizational strategies, and opinions and values that students may have never considered before. Within a multicultural and multiperspectived community -- which is seen as a positive value in a democratic society -- it is important to celebrate the ideas of others.

When students understand that they, and others, tend to adhere to a mental model and shape their actions according to this model, a new perspective on change is possible. Often only radical change is considered important change, but change within the construct of a mental model can be seen to occur in incremental and developmental ways. It is not necessarily conversion from one point of view to another point of view in the face of alternatives; rather, change happens as a natural process of intellectual and academic growth.

Mental models tend to ground students. They are relaxing places to work from because, from this grounded perspective, it is easy to accept others' points of view. When students understand that others also work from mental models, and that these mental models also provide a guide to their actions as well, there is a comfort zone in the classroom. Students of differing

perspectives are more able to see where others are coming from, and can better share without the feeling that they are being manipulated. Instead of learning as radical change, learning is seen as a process like learning a language where a young child is encouraged even though the expression of meaning -- as in the way the term *da da* can be used to say everything from doggie to doughnut -- is not exact or accurate. The parent or adult encourages the child's attempts at expression and anticipates that the child's language patterns will grow and develop naturally. In the same way, initial explorations of topics can encouraged despite their sometimes naiveté[12].

4) Team Learning

In a business, teams are always made up of people. Successful businesses understand that the different strengths of the people who work within the business community often mold the strength of the business. Businesses who have come to understand themselves as learning communities, communities that foster team learning, work to both encourage individual strength of their members and the strength of the community.

Within the principle of team learning, alignment is seen as more fruitful than agreement. To agree can mean to come to one mind, but many minds tend to be stronger than one mind. The question becomes: how can we work together, yet encourage the strengths of diversity? Team learning suggests that it is not necessary to force agreement. Instead, it is better to develop a home for dialogue.

[12]In our work with students, we call this "first-draft" thinking; and, we allow a good deal of it, given some basic ground rules of taste and edification.

In a social studies classroom addressing and acting on public issues, dialogue about important questions is a must. Some of these questions include: What is the meaning of change? and What is learning? Team learning is not team building; team building is seen as a sort of "rah rah, all for one and one for all" feeling. Instead, team learning allows that different perspectives can exist so that dialogue can emerge. Dialogue means that people share ideas and that ideas can change shape. They are not like Senge's ping-pong balls being hit from one side of a table to another, where the ball doesn't change shape and the purpose is more to win the point than to remodel an idea.

Part of team learning is the development of a shared intention, being safe and adventuresome at the same time, being individual and collective together. The steps of team learning include invitation, generative listening, observation, and the suspending of assumptions -- again meaning the display of the assumptions as opposed to holding them back. Within team learning it is important to check out plans, making sure that the shared vision remains in effect.

5. Systems Thinking

Like businesses, social studies classrooms are also systems. Within systems, things interconnect. A social studies classroom that thinks like a system would radically move the traditional style of organizing a social studies classroom from a place of fragmentation, where wholes are broken up into tiny parts so that analysis is made easier. In part, the move toward systems thinking in the business community is a rejection of traditional Western and

scientific thinking generally based on the belief that the best way to understand how things work is to break items under study into their smallest parts, to study them in their distinction, and then to reconstitute the pieces of knowledge gained from an individual inspection into a whole. The resulting knowledge is knowledge of added up pieces. The problem with this sort of analytic thinking is that the person who does it has a difficult time seeing the forest for the trees. Analytic thinking becomes like highlighting parts of a book. The parts that are highlighted stand out to the eye and are easy to inspect; however, the whole of the text (everything that has not been highlighted) is now hidden. Many public issues, for example those in the area of ecology, have been brought about in part by the predominance of analytic thought. It is difficult, when analyzing, to move from the study of the tiniest bit to making sense of the whole. What often remains hidden is the impact of actions. We become so concerned with concentrating on the part -- the part becomes the whole -- that we miss how the part fits into the whole.

Systems thinking naturally links and integrates. It is not artificial, but holistic. Values and mental models that stress concepts like balance and adaptation become foremost. Questions like "what is the purpose of the system?" (shared vision) are important to ask. These questions encourage actions that promote long-range goals instead of the "quick fix." They encourage community relationships rather than adversarial relationships. And, they encourage the feeling that even if people differ and disagree on certain aspects, they can still work together. In fact, systems thinking addresses difficult questions about working relationships: "In what ways does the process seem to force adversarial positions? What can we do to overcome these positions? What remains is that the community -- the system -- can remain fixed on the source

of the problem (the public issue) and not become so focused on the difficulties of communication and community.

Activities Adapted from the Five Discipline Fieldbook for Developing Learning Organizations (Senge et al, 1994).

Personal Mastery

1. "Discover Your Personal Vision" Activity

I. Choose one (or two) of the following areas that is most important to you (some people do them all) and ask yourself: "If I could make the ideal situation in this area suddenly materialize in my future, what would it look like? What would I be doing in the situation? What would other people be doing? What other specific characteristics would be present?"

Write down your ideal vision in as much detail as you can. Include: (a) Self-image: b) Tangible things you want to own: (c) Home: (d) Relationships: (e) Work: (f) Personal pursuits: (g) Community: (h) Other: (i) Life purpose:

b. This step helps clarify your vision. Ask yourself: If I could have it now, would I take it?

If you say "no," analyze why. Perhaps the vision doesn't truly reflect what you want, but what someone else wants. Other reasons like fear or low self-worth prevent people from taking what they want. Perhaps your vision needs slight revision to get at what you really want.

c. This step helps expand your vision. Ask yourself: If I had it now, what would it bring me?

Then to your answer to this question, ask, "And what would *that* bring me?" To each successive answer ask again, "And what would *that* bring me?"

2. Moments of awareness (MA)

Tell students: At any moment when you're frustrated or surprised by the results you're getting or what's happening around you, try forcing yourself to stop and "Remember these moments of awareness," an inner activity in four steps.

a. What is happening at this moment? (What am I doing, feeling, thinking right now?)
b. What do I want at this moment? (What am I trying to achieve ?)
c. What am I doing this moment to prevent myself from getting what I want?
d. Say, "I choose to _____." Then take a deep breath and do it.

3. Choosing to Bring a Vision to Reality

Tell students: There is no activity to help you choose. There is just a moment when you make a conscious, deliberate commitment to your vision. Before you can do this, you need to spend time sharpening the image of your vision, checking it out to be sure you really want it, and speculating about the sorts of sacrifices and obstacles that you might encounter bringing this vision to reality. You decide you want it

badly enough to commit yourself. Then you choose. And the vision becomes part of you.

When working with teams of people, some teachers set aside time for students to think or write about what commitment to this vision will really mean for them. Some teachers hold a final large group session to sharpen and focus the vision, then ask that students stand when they feel ready to make a personal choice for that vision.

Shared Vision

4. <u>What do we want to create?</u>

When a group of students is designing an action project related to an issue being studied, this exercise might provide a good starting place.

a. As a group, create an ideal vision of the future. Imagine the most desirable scenario you could have in five years time. Using flipcharts, brainstorm answers to the following questions: (a) What are we doing in this vision? (b) Who else is involved in our activity, and what are they doing? (c) What have we achieved? (d) How do other people see us? (e) How do we impact other people and groups around us? (e) What are our goals?

b. Now examine the current reality of this situation through your perspective as this group of people. Ask yourselves: (a) What are our biggest problems? (b) What are we doing now to perpetuate the problems? (c) Who else is involved in our activity, and

what are they doing? (d) How do other people see us? (e) How do we impact other people and groups around us?

5. Backing into a Vision

This activity helps students recall positive past experiences of working in a team or doing a project, and develop lessons from these for the project at hand.

Have the group of students work through the following questions, posting answers on flip charts: (a) Have you ever been part of a really good team? (b) What was different about this team? (c) How can we, as a team, create those kinds of feelings here? (d) What would we commit ourselves to?

Mental Models

6. Ladder of Inference

We each interpret what we hear in a conversation. We believe that what we hear is what everyone heard and that our interpretations are the truth that is self-evident to everyone. We then draw conclusions based on this "truth," and take actions based on these conclusions. This is "climbing the ladder of inference."

Then, surprise! We find that others climbed their own ladders. They have very different opinions about what happened, and their opinions might even collide head-on with ours. The result can be frustration or bewilderment. We might argue, give up and withdraw, or privately make negative judgments about the others.

To get on the same track, have students stop in the middle of a large group conversation periodically to do three things:

1. Ask yourself, what am I thinking and feeling, and what are my reasons behind my opinions?
2. Tell the others the reasons behind your thinking.
3. Ask others to explain their feelings, or the reasons behind their thinking.

7. Left-hand Column

This activity helps make clear people's different ladders of inference when a problem in communication happens.

a. Have students write a brief paragraph describing the problem. What do you want to happen, and what do you believe is blocking you? Now recall a frustrating conversation related to this problem.

b. Then have students divide a page lengthwise into two columns. In the right hand column, write down "What Was Said." Write everything you can recall that was actually stated in that dialogue.

c. In the left hand column, write down "What I Was Thinking." Include all the thoughts and feelings you had but didn't say.

d. Students can do two things with these columns. Have the other person involved in conversation do the exercise, then compare the columns and talk out the unsaid things and the inferences each person was making. Or, students can analyze their

own columns. Ask: (a) What led me to think and feel this way? (b) What was my intent? (c) Why didn't I say what I was thinking? (d) What assumptions did I make the other person? (e) How did I contribute to the problem?

8. Multiple Perspectives

This activity helps a small group of eight students explore a problem from multiple perspectives. Make a large cardboard disk about eighteen inches in diameter. Write the problem in the center of the wheel. Draw lines to divide the wheel into eight equal pie-shaped slices. In each space, write the name of a person or group who might have a particular perspective on this problem. Around the outside of the wheel, place the eight name tags representing each student in the group.

Spin the wheel. Students now takes on the perspective in the wheel pie that stopped to rest opposite their name tags. Going around the group, students present their understanding of this perspective, saying "From my perspective as _____, the critical elements in this situation are....." Students can consider the following elements to imagine what the perspective might be:

Time: When did this become a problem for me, and when will it no longer be an issue?
Expectation: What do I expect to happen? What are others' expectations of me?
Understanding: What do I see that nobody else can see about this problem?

Team Learning

9. Undiscussables

The activity helps students "air out" feelings and suspicions or concerns about the project process itself or other people that can't normally be discussed openly in a group.

a. Each person in the group gets three 3X5 cards, and an identical writing tool. Silently, each person writes one "undiscussable" on each card.

b. Cards are collected, shuffled, then "dealt" out, giving three to each student. Students read their cards aloud to the whole group.

c. The whole group then clusters the cards to find common themes. These themes are listed and ranked in priority. The top theme is chosen first for discussion.

d. The group tackles this "undiscussable" theme, asking questions like: (a) What has kept us from discussing this issue? (b) How is it blocking our progress? (c) How does it fit with our shared vision and our project plan? (d) What should we do about it?

10. Dialogue Reminders

Groups of students are reminded to think about all of the tools of open communication and focus on group process as well as product. Below are some checkpoints to use in focusing on process:

a. Purposes: Ask yourself: What do I really want in this conversation? And be sure others know your purpose.

b. Balance active listening with promoting: The group asks itself at points in the dialogue: Are we each just saying what we think? Or are we trying to help others really picture what we think, and showing the reasoning and feelings behind our thinking? (promoting) Are we just politely listening to each other? Or are we actively trying to understand what each other is saying and find out what each other is really feeling? (active listening)

c. Share understandings: Ask yourself: do we all have the same understanding about the key terms we're using in this dialogue? Have we discussed definitions?

d. Check self-awareness: Ask yourself at moments of anger or frustration: What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What do I want this minute?

e. Explore blocks: As a group, pinpoint the sources of disagreement. These usually are in one of four categories:

Facts - disagreeing about what has actually happened
Methods - disagreeing about how we should do the task
Goals - disagreeing about what outcome we want to end up with
Values - disagreeing about what we believe is most important

Systems Thinking

11. Exploring your own Story

Each group of students chooses a specific problem within a general issue that the class is exploring. Each group picks a problem that is: (a) Important: something the group really cares about; (b) Chronic: something that has repeatedly caused trouble; (c) Of limited scope: something that can be reduced to two sentences; (d) Known: something students know the history and patterns of.

Each student in the group chooses the perspective of a particular person or group involved in the problem. The student then writes a story telling the problem, from this particular perspective. The student identifies (1) the characters in the problem and (2) the important factors of the problem. (A variation is to have each student draw a picture, such as a graph, representing the problem.)

Groups then compare the different stories or pictures from an overall perspective. Discuss: (a) how the different stories complement each other, filling in gaps; (b) ways the stories are related; and, (c) ways the differences in the stories can be explained and reconciled.

12. The Five "Why's"

Each group of students chooses a specific problem to examine in the issue they are studying or a specific problem they perceive related to how they are functioning as a group.

The group writes a sentence stating the problem. Then they explore answers through a succession of "Why" questions. The following example was produced by a group of students that almost split apart due to interpersonal misunderstandings.

Problem statement: "We don't respect each other in this group."

First why: Write a question about this statement: "Why don't we have respect in this group?" And answer the question: "Because we don't listen to each other.

Second why: Write a question about this answer: "Why don't we listen to each other?" And answer it: "Because we don't take the time."

Third why: "Why don't we take the time?" "Because we give this discussion low priority, we rush to go on to other things we think are more interesting."

Fourth why: "Why don't we find this discussion as interesting as other things?" "Because we don't feel personally committed to this project?"

Fifth why: "Why don't we feel personally committed to this project?" "Because bottom line we don't believe our plan of action is going to accomplish anything meaningful or contribute anything interesting."

At this point the group is beginning to get at the real problem behind the surface symptoms of trouble. The next step would be to probe this problem and discuss possible solutions. (One solution might be to completely re-design the project!)

Conclusion

This paper has presented a call for social studies curriculum to promote citizenship education through active immersion in public issues. Especially, we promote issue studies grounded in purposeful social action.

Issues are immediately relevant to students: issues motivate student interest and connect students to their worlds as responsible citizens. Working with issues helps students find and validate their own voices through forming well-considered and logical opinions, as well as learn to appreciate multiple perspectives and deconstruct their own and others' perspectives to see assumptions, gaps and silences, and essential differences in worldviews.

But we caution that the very complexity of an issue can seduce its explorers into an endless and probably fascinating unraveling of perspectives and layers of data. Ultimately the rational model of issue-analysis begs questions like "so what?" and "now what?" -- as in, what are we going to do about it? Also, skills of appreciating others' perspectives learned in the potentially arid hothouse of classroom discussion do not transfer easily to the public world of the embodied intensity of action, where we want something, where we'll suffer if it doesn't happen, and where we must find effective ways to work with others to name and struggle against the obstacles.

For these reasons, we propose that more space be created for concrete projects of action in the social studies classroom, especially generative creative projects thoughtfully designed by students to address issues of concern in their everyday lives. We already know the benefits of action projects as a

grounding for learning which fulfills so many curricular objectives at once. Projects immerse students in experiential learning which naturally integrates learning with doing, knowledge with skills and attitudes, social studies with other "disciplines" such as language learning, science, and mathematics.

Projects, through their sheer breadth and depth of work, usually promote collaborative work. Projects involve a student wholly: emotionally, intuitively, physically, and cognitively. Through projects student effort is directed towards *accomplishing* something meaningful, not as artificial products whose sole use ends on a classroom wall. Through projects student learning is situated directly in the messy enclave of real action.

But a project can be hollow means-end production without critical reflection, just as any organization can become so narrowly focused on the "how-tos" governing its action agenda that potential lessons are swallowed in the urgency of production. Our paper ends with a series of practical tools designed to transform action projects into reflective learning, derived from current popular literature describing "the learning organization." These tools seem to us to have utility for classroom teachers interested in developing social action projects connecting students with their communities. The tools were designed to help uncover private issues and link these to public issues (Personal Mastery and Systems Thinking), to envision an action project (Shared Vision), to identify and challenge assumptions (Mental Models), and to suggest lines of reflection during the enactment of the project (Team Learning). These tools were originally designed by educators to assist organizations to reconfigure their focus: from action for the sake of production to action as an opportunity to learn. The project of a learning

organization, as we understand it, is oriented towards nurturing individuals' growth and organizational ability to learn new attitudes, skills, and knowledge, and in recreating itself as a reflexive, interdependent community responding to the changing issues and conditions of its environment.

We suggest that this goal is not far removed from the goals of citizenship education. The method for achieving the goal is centered on reflective dialogue growing naturally from and wrapping around purposeful action towards meaningful goals. The goals are propelled by issues that people care about, issues which have been coaxed out of private dark closets and into the open air of collaborative dialogue. These are issues that people choose, because if the issues are always imposed from without -- from the teacher's world of concerns -- the intensive sort of personal connection which fuels and sustains a taxing action project is less likely to occur. If the issues are frozen in circles of analyzed discussion, with or without artificial resolution in "solutions," they risk being paralyzed by unconscious passivity and withdrawal.

Finally, we believe that citizenship education, fostering students who are responsible and thoughtful participants in their communities, may be renewed if social studies teachers re-consider the study of public issues as drawing forth student issues inspiring a vision, transforming the vision into projects of social action, and grounding the projects in reflective dialogue.

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